

Constitutional amendment on tax increases fails in state Senate

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Republicans brought the constitutional amendment on tax increases to the floor of the Washington Legislature knowing it would fail, as did Democrats who still tried to pass several amendments.

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OLYMPIA — The state Senate failed to reach the required vote threshold Friday to send voters a constitutional amendment asking if they want to require a two-thirds supermajority in the Legislature for future tax increases.

Senate Joint Resolution 8211 failed in the Republican-led chamber because only 26 senators — 25 Republicans and a Democrat who caucuses with them — voted in support, shy of the 33 votes needed. Constitutional amendments require a two-thirds vote in both the Senate and House before they can be sent to the ballot for a public vote.

“Taxpayers want a higher bar to raise taxes, to take money from them,” said Republican Sen. Andy Hill of Redmond, the Senate’s main budget writer.

Currently, taxes can be raised via the usual requirement for bills: a majority of votes in each chamber. In the Senate, that would be 25 of its 49 members.

Democrats argued the measure would limit the Legislature’s ability to remove tax exemptions at a time when they’re trying to find funding for education and mental health, and would give a minority of the Legislature the ability to veto any tax increase or exemption repeal.

“We have a constitutional republic for a reason, and supermajority empowers the minority of 17 to control one half of the entire ledger of how the people’s money flows,” said Sen. Reuven Carlyle, D-Seattle. “We’re better than this as a state.”

The vote comes just weeks after a King County Superior Court judge [struck down](#) a voter-approved initiative that would have cut the sales tax by 1 percentage point, beginning April 15, unless lawmakers allow a public vote on an amendment that would require a two-thirds supermajority in the Legislature for future tax increases.

The state Supreme Court granted expedited review to an appeal of the ruling, and oral arguments will be held on Initiative 1366 on March 15.

Republican Sen. Pam Roach of Sumner, the sponsor of the joint resolution, said a constitutional amendment is needed because “the people really did speak and we did not listen.”

“We have an opportunity to give to the people what they want,” she said.

Republicans brought the measure to the floor knowing it would fail, as did Democrats who still tried to pass several amendments, including one that would have not allowed a two-thirds requirement to eliminate or change tax exemptions “when used to meet the State’s paramount duty to fund basic education.”

“If they’re going to play politics on the Senate floor, I think we deserve a conversation about education and about transparency,” said Sen. Marko Liias, D-Everett. “We tried to push the debate back on issues folks care about at home instead of this political theater.”

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